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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 000115

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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN UNION LEADER MURDERED

Classified By: Amb. Derham for reasons 1.4(b),(d)

11. (U) Summary: On January 15 unidentified gunmen assassinated Pedro Zamora, General Secretary of the Guatemalan Dock Workers Union of Puerto Quetzal (STEPQ), as he was driving home with his children. Zamora was shot 20 times and killed at point-blank range. At the time of his death, Zamora was negotiating a new collective bargaining agreement with port management. STEPQ and the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), the sectoral union with which STEPQ is affiliated, have called for a full investigation. Embassy will press Guatemalan government officials to fully investigate and prosecute the case, At this point, the motivation for the murder remains unclear. End summary.

12. (U) Pedro Zamora, General Secretary of the Guatemalan Dock Workers Union of Puerto Quetzal (STEPQ), was murdered January 15 by unidentified gunmen as he was driving home to Escuintla, two hours south of the capital. He was shot 20 times by multiple assailants who ambushed his car after he picked up his two sons from a hospital appointment. After assailants reportedly fired more than 100 shots, 20 of which struck Zamora, one of the assailants walked up to Zamora's car and shot him in the face at point-blank range in front of his two children. Zamora's three-year-old son was injured in the shooting. Zamora, 43, served eight years as General Secretary of the 500-member union at Puerto Quetzal,

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Guatemala's main port. The attack on Zamora was the second attack on a STEPQ leader within the past year. Six months earlier, another union leader was shot by unidentified gunmen but survived.

13. (C) The motive for Zamora's murder remains unknown, but union leaders and labor rights groups believe the murder was related to Zamora's work as a union leader and activist. Because the ports are the locus of so many illegal activities centered around contraband, there may be other explanations for the murder. At the time of his murder, Zamora was negotiating, on behalf of union members, a new collective bargaining agreement over wages, terms and conditions, and benefits with port authorities, and demanding reinstatement of dismissed workers. Labor contacts claim that he had also been leading union efforts to stop rumored privatization of the port, though there are no indications at this time that the current administration, with less than a year left in office, is contemplating privatizing the ports.

14. (C) According to the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), Zamora and other union members had been subject to harassment and intimidation. Zamora had received death threats and had believed he was being followed for

several months. ITF claims that the general manager had twice sent in police in civilian clothes to threaten workers during demonstrations and to tell Zamora and other union leaders to stop opposing management.

15. (C) Rob Wayss, AFL-CIO Solidarity Center Representative for Central America, who alerted poloff January 16 to the death of Zamora, said that the last information he had from the union in December was that the negotiation with port management had been going well. He expressed outrage over the attack on Zamora and his son and deep concern for the safety of other STEPQ union leaders and members at the port, and said that it is important that the GOG put an end to the harassment and intimidation of the labor movement at the port.

16. (C) Bob Perillo, Latin America Liaison for the U.S. Labor Education in the Americas Project (USLEAP) (an independent NGO headquartered in Chicago that supports labor rights in Central America, Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador), suggested that the manner of execution indicated that the assassins were trying to send a clear message to the union. He noted also that the excessive use of gunfire suggests involvement of a professional death squad. He added that the port had been implicated in the past for entry of contraband items, but that there was no indication that Zamora had been involved in any illicit activities at the port.

17. (U) In its public statement, the Frente Nacional de Lucha por la Defensa de Servicios Publicos y los Recursos Naturales (FNL), a local leftist coalition of labor unions and popular organizations, condemned Zamora's murder and stressed that the crime should not go unpunished.

18. (U) The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and ITF will submit the case to the International Labor Organization and call upon the Guatemalan government to guarantee full respect for the rule of law and fundamental workers' rights and to ensure that those responsible for the killing are brought to justice and that the continuing culture of impunity is brought to an end.

19. (U) Comment: Guatemala's ports are notorious for corruption and other crimes, including contraband, smuggling, and container hijackings, much of it perpetrated by organized criminal organizations employing bribery and intimidation to obtain their ends. We cannot rule out that Zamora's death may have been related to these other port "activities." Nonetheless, Embassy will press Guatemalan government authorities to fully investigate Zamora's murder and to ensure the safety of STEPQ union leaders and members.  
Derham